

Technical summary: Higher National Certifications and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2009–10 to 2021–22

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Background

SQA conducts regular analyses of Higher National (HN) certifications by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD); this piece of research is part of that work. Monitoring HN certifications by SIMD is important as it helps SQA understand the makeup of HN certifications. In addition, understanding trends in characteristics of HN certifications provides insight into the wider education sector as a whole, as it relates to personal pathways, accessibility, and sector growth.

Research questions

- Do HN certifications completed in 2021–22 follow the same SIMD pattern as in previous years?
- What is the difference in HN certifications between SIMD quintiles by sector?
- What do characteristics like age and sex of HN certifications show when analysed by SIMD?

Methodology

We analysed HN certifications by their SIMD, and other characteristics such as sex, age, and sector. Only records from Scottish centres in the period between 2009–10 and 2021–22 were extracted for this report. Between 2009–10 and 2021–22, there were 22,400 HN certifications on average each year. The SIMD is the Scottish Government's official tool for identifying relative deprivation across Scotland. It incorporates several different aspects of deprivation (employment, income, health, education, access to services, crime, and housing), combining them into a single index.

Key findings

- HN certifications from the most deprived quintile have become a larger proportion of all certifications over time, while certifications from the least deprived quintile have become a smaller proportion of all certifications.
- The overall number of HN certifications have been decreasing over time.
- More HN certifications are female than male.
- The proportion of HN certifications from the most deprived quintile increases with age.

Implications

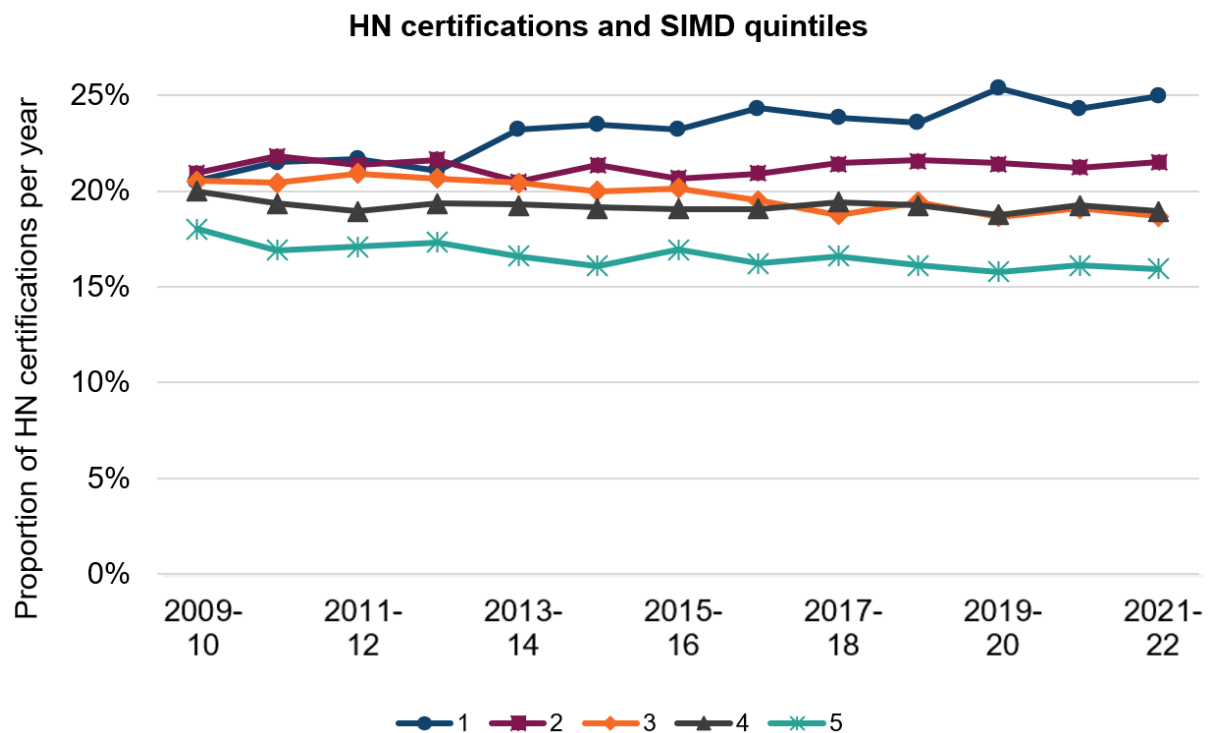
These findings demonstrate that HN certifications continue to provide access to further education to people from the most deprived areas in Scotland, in particular females and older learners. These findings provide understanding into wider education trends in Scotland as they relate to personal pathways. However the findings also reveal a decrease in certifications since 2017–18. Following this research, an analysis of HN certifications up to 2022–23 was conducted to understand potential reasons for drops in the numbers of certifications.

Next steps

There will be an updated analysis of new certifications up to 2023–24.

Visual summary

Trend of HN certifications between 2009–10 and 2021–22



Access the full report

You can read the [full research report](#) on our website.

This summary is intended for general audiences and simplifies complex research. Please refer to the full report for detailed methodology, complete findings, and technical discussion.